

The Lovers

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He wasn't much to look at, a veritable worm to some not knowing him. His long, swarthy body sported a face that would bring fear and loathing to many individuals encountering it in broad daylight—forget about those dark alley stereotypes. He spent years travelling the oceans, dining in exotic places and facing perils unheard of by those back home. He had changed considerably since his youthful days, growing taller and darker, but certainly not more handsome. He had put on a considerable amount of fat as well as muscle, due to his gluttonous eating habits. In spite of the food and travel he had relished these past few years, he instinctively felt the need to return home. There would be a woman waiting for him and a destiny to fulfill.

He never knew his mother and father, tragically sharing similar circumstances with the other children he grew up with. His parents and many others had perished after the last great event had taken place, and the surviving youngsters had to fend for themselves. Abandoned, alone and frightened, many of them had been killed early on by local hazards. Some died of natural causes, such as starvation and disease, but remarkably enough, a few managed to survive on what little food and shelter the environment had to offer. From many parts of the world, these survivors joined him in their quest towards home. It would be a new beginning for some and a catastrophic end for others, but the drive from within conquered all doubts and fears they may have harbored. They strove onward.

The few who met near the wave-swept shores of the ocean joined forces with larger groups of travelers as they moved inland, following the meanders of the rivers and streams along their trek. Blind ambition was their guide, and the desire to reach home was so great, that it superseded the body's basic needs for sustenance, rest and sleep. Like zombies, they hypnotically ambled forth, ignoring the risks surrounding them. Exhaustion took its toll on many of the group's members, while unforeseeable dangers and accidents took the lives of others. Still, he and the strongest of the remaining pilgrims avoided becoming early casualties as they finally reached their much sought-after destination. They were home.

To an ordinary bystander observing the scene, she didn't stand out from the crowd, which milled about anxiously after the epic journey. There was something about her that caught his eye. She, too, was a dark, lanky

individual with no breasts or hips to speak of to break up the contour of her body. Her face lacked the delicate features we commonly consider to be attractive, but her small eyes and lack of cheekbones hadn't diminished his growing desire for her. Personality didn't even matter to him. If she said nothing at all, it wouldn't change a thing. He knew it was only a matter of time before they would be together.

He broke through the crowd and methodically eased his way toward her, ignoring all others along the way. Something entirely animal was in control of his movements as he inched his way nearer to her. From the corner of her eye, she caught his sinewy form slowly coming towards her. A bit pushy, she momentarily thought, noticing his blatant come-on, which singled her out from the other hopefuls. She knew what he was after, and she would put up no fight. Her own quest had led her to this place as well. Why couldn't he be the one? True, he wasn't anyone special from the crowd, perhaps fatter than most in a robust sort of way. The fact that he wanted her made him immediately more attractive than the rest. She watched his continued approach and responded to his advancement by discreetly backing away from the crowd in order that they might be alone. She could smell, perhaps even taste him now, and she felt her lust growing from within the depths of her lithe body. Together, they slipped away from the horde, unnoticed and unconcerned for anything but the fate that awaited them.

The azure July sky was patchy with cumulous clouds blowing in the steady breeze. The clouds cast welcome shadows intermittently over the landscape, bringing relief from the scorching summer sun. The surrounding forest sans clearings was an unsuitable location for the two lovers, so they made their bed in soft, fine gravel. Together, they lay naked, their bodies beside one another, barely touching. After a couple of awkward attempts, common in the early stages of foreplay, when no one is sure who's supposed to make the first move, he reached over towards her nubile frame and slowly planted kisses along the moist skin of her body, licking his way down her back. She reciprocated his every move, each of them savoring the textures, aromas and tastes encountered along the way. They gingerly stroked and massaged each other, lightly focusing their attentions in the regions that caused them to shiver when brushed against.

After a few minutes, as he directed his attention back towards her face, he sensed that they were ready. Without warning, he seized her from behind the neck and locked his body in a tightly wrapped embrace with hers. He thrust himself against her, sending her into waves of tumultuous vibrations. They abruptly flexed, paused and climaxed, showering their seed over the bed in shudders of ecstasy.

The two immediately broke from their embrace as if they had been struck by lightning. Concerned about what had just happened, they rushed

about rearranging the bed so everything would be in order. When everything was in its place and they had rested for a few moments, they looked at each other with the wild eyes of reckless abandon and repeated their raw, lusty performance. All afternoon and perhaps into the early evening the lovers remained in bed, working their feverishly aching passions towards shattering climaxes, each followed by brief periods of rearrangement and rest. They had earned this moment, surviving all obstacles in their lives in order that they might have this chance. If all things following this event were ideal, there would be children within a short time. The young couple would be proud of their offspring, but they would never live to see, hold, care for or nurture them into adulthood.

Lampetra tridentata, commonly referred to as the Pacific Lamprey, is a parasitic, anadromous species of lamprey, an eel-like fish which spawns in cool, freshwater streams entering the Pacific Ocean in North America. In July of 1998, while on a research trip to Clayoquot Sound, B.C., I observed a pair of lampreys as they went through courtship rituals and spawning behaviors. I was assisting a fellow student with a freshwater stream study, and in the midst of measuring the width, depth and flow of the stream, I happened to see the lampreys.

The site of their bed was the sand/gravel substrate within a riffle area of the stream, about ten inches below the surface of the water. There were some four- to six-inch diameter rocks around and within the area as well, adding complexity to the carefully chosen site of their nest. Water flow, if too high, washes the oval, slightly adhesive eggs downstream, and if too low, increases the chance of stagnation, disease and low oxygen levels with respect to the eggs. The lampreys pair up, choose a nest site and lie beside each other. After some mutual stimulation, the male seizes the female from behind the back of her head with his primitive, jawless mouth and wraps his body alongside hers so their sexual organs are near each other. The two of them vibrate for a few seconds as they release their milt and eggs into the stream. They immediately separate and search for their eggs, arranging them in presumably safe places within the confines of the nest. They repeat their performance until they are exhausted of energy, eggs and sperm, existing only for a short time before their impending deaths. The young lampreys hatch in about 19 days, migrate upstream and bury themselves in the substrate, living off algae and whatever they can filter from the water. They grow in the streams and finally work their way down to the ocean, where they become predators on fish, growing large and fat in preparation for their migration back to their places of birth. The whole cycle repeats itself, and as one can see, their life history can be related in a practical, scientific sense, or in a more beautiful, sensual, thought-provoking way.